
Community meeting summary April 26, 2005

About 60 community members attended the 2nd community meeting on April 28 to review and comment on the Pro Parks Loyal Heights Playfield Improvement project. Parks and City staff available at the meeting to answer questions included Royal Alley-Barnes (Parks North Operations Manager), Dennis Cook (Senior Recreation Program Coordinator), Mike Mirante (Athletic Field Coordinator), Cathy Tuttle (Project Planner), and Karen Galt and Ted Holden (Parks Landscape Architects), and Julie Erickson (Seattle Transportation Community Relations).

Two Project Advisory Team meetings will be held June 1 and June 22 from 7 to 8:30 p.m. at Loyal Heights Community Center, 2101 NW 77th Street. The Board of Parks Commissioners will hold a public hearing on the project on Thursday, July 14 at 100 Dexter Avenue North. Park Board meetings begin at 6 p.m. The Pro Parks Levy provides \$2,315,658 in project costs for planning, design, and construction. The exact Levy description of the project is: “upgrade and improve play surfaces and field amenities.” The field will be upgraded with synthetic surface in 2006.

The 1997 Joint Athletic Facilities Development Program (JAFDP) identified priority athletic facility projects that would increase the amount of capacity and improve the quality of play on City fields for youth and adults. The 2002 update of the JAFDP looked at ways to increase the scheduling capacity of the City’s athletic fields and examine the field system as a whole in order to make improvements for both field users and neighbors throughout the city. Loyal Heights Playfield was one of the priority projects identified for improvements with the JAFDP. This project will resurface two existing ball fields and the football/soccer field for year-round, all-weather use and improved quality of play. The project will include input from the local neighborhood and the Citywide recreation community.

The following are a summary of the comments and questions at the April 28 community meeting. Parks staff has worked hard to provide answers to these questions and incorporate community ideas into the project.

Who benefits from athletic field project? This project is geared toward ball players. What about "non-athletic" kids that don't play sports? Parks supports a variety of programs at the Loyal Heights complex and throughout the city. Loyal Heights has a play area, grass picnic lawn, and a community center that support many important community activities. The field has historically been an athletic field and will continue that use with a synthetic surface.

How much can the field be used? Can the hours be limited? Currently the Loyal Heights field is closed from mid-November through early March so that the grass be restored. Scheduled hours are anticipated to increase during winter months. The Loyal Heights Playfield was scheduled 1,507 hours in 2004. Parks anticipates an additional 1,066 hours will be scheduled from August through February after the field is upgraded.

Why this field? How was decision made to use synthetic? The decision to upgrade Loyal Heights Playfield was initially made in the Joint Athletic Facilities Development Program (JAFDP), a report that had extensive public review and that was approved by City Council in 1999 and again in 2002. The Pro Parks Levy, approved by voters in 2000, requires Parks to “upgrade and improve play surfaces and field amenities” at Loyal Heights. Ten Parks and Seattle Public Schools playfields have been upgraded with synthetic surfaces. An additional five fields, including Loyal Heights Playfield, have funding for upgrades in the next two years. Fields were chosen to meet the growing needs of athletic field users in neighborhoods throughout Seattle. Lights were an important factor in choosing fields to change to synthetic.

Why was synthetic selected for Loyal Heights? Is it environmentally the best option? A thorough evaluation of grass versus synthetic surfaces was done by the Active Sports and Youth Recreation Commission for King County, www.metrokc.gov/parks/asyrcc/docs/synthetic-surfaces.pdf Based on economics, safety and environmental concerns, this report recommends synthetic infill surfaces, like the one proposed for Loyal Heights, whenever possible instead of grass. King County conducted laboratory and field studies and determined in-fill synthetic surfaces are safer for the environment than grass. They were so convinced by the evidence, they granted a permit for Redmond to install a three-field synthetic surface within 100 yards of a Class II salmon stream. A synthetic field is an environmental win to the community for many reasons: it doesn’t need watering, fertilizing, herbicides; doesn’t need cutting, so there is no noise and air pollution; reuses products that would go to waste; improves quality of runoff water; it produces no dust, pollen, and particulate matter is dispersed into the air.

I think synthetic fields are unhealthy. Synthetic fields are not unhealthy. Ensuring public safety is a major Parks responsibility. Parks Athletic Field Coordinator Mike Mirante reports “FieldTurf has been in our system for eight years

without one report of injury, abrasions or infections caused by the surface.” An outbreak of five cases of antibiotic resistant staph infections was reported by the CDC in 2003 in the St. Louis Rams football team that plays in an indoor stadium on AstroTurf has bacterial conditions far different than Loyal Heights. The report blamed poor hygiene for problems more than the field surface. For example, players often shared whirlpool baths and towels after shaving their bodies, spreading infection. FieldTurf infill material is made of patented silica sand and cryogenic rubber and does not produce health risks. There is no research to prove that the rubber has any negative health effects on users of the fields or the surrounding communities. In fact, research and analysis of waste water from rain coming through synthetic infill fields shows that it is cleaner than that coming from grass fields and other surfaces. According to Parks Hazardous Materials Supervisor, Jodi Sinclair, “The cryogenic processing of the rubber creates a chemical bond & stability supporting the durability claim. The patent on the silica is a process that ‘rounds’ the edges of the particulate. This reduces the dust hazard. The combined rubber/silica product density is heavy enough to deter ‘dust’ impact and not affect air quality for the players or the surrounding neighborhood. There is an extensive list of professional, collegiate, high schools and middle schools using this turf with no negative consequence. The product does not show any reason for environmental concern as long as the storm drainage meets the City Stormwater Rules.”

Does synthetic turf cause more injuries? New synthetic surfaces such as FieldTurf are safer than grass when tested for impact. Impact numbers often increase on worn grass fields and hard-packed dirt. It is true that grass is favored for play by many athletes. Unfortunately, grass wears out very quickly unless well cared for and played on sparingly. In high use situations such as urban athletic fields, grass just doesn’t hold up over time. Studies based on old AstroTurf-type surfaces show increased injuries but studies do not show increased injuries for new FieldTurf.

If replacement is required in 15 years then Parks budget should cover it now. This project is too expensive. All Parks facilities need to be periodically upgraded or replaced including grass fields, playgrounds and community centers. Parks budgets reflect these major maintenance projects and are adjusted to meet existing needs. Reports have shown that an investment in a synthetic field, especially one that is lighted and can be used for play after dark, is a better investment than a grass field. A single synthetic field can offset the demand on many other grass fields, thereby freeing up resources. A synthetic field costs a fraction of what a grass field costs to maintain. Like synthetic fields, grass fields also have high capital costs as they need periodic resurfacing.

Will a SEPA checklist be created? Yes, a State Environmental Protection Agency checklist will be available for review at the end of the summer.

What mitigation plans will be in place during construction for noise, traffic and pollution? Construction will comply with City Ordinances and construction will occur during normal working hours. We anticipate construction to start in late summer 2006 and take approximately three months.

How much impact is there from parking? Will Parks do a parking study? A parking study by CTS Engineers was conducted on 4/23/05, on a Saturday morning when the Community Center was open and both baseball and softball fields were fully scheduled. Their conclusions were that existing parking is sufficient for this upgrade. No off-street parking is provided for the playfield or Community Center. NW 77th, to the north of the Community Center is striped for diagonal on-street parking. Parking is prohibited on the playfield side of 22nd Avenue NW, to the west. While no additional parking is required, the community perception of traffic congestion and limited parking may continue with this upgrade. Parks will work with SDOT to ameliorate nearby traffic impacts.

We are concerned by the loss of green spaces. An athletic field is not a lawn or place for off-leash dogs. All dog use is currently illegal and will continue to be a non-conforming use. As a synthetic field, this space remains a valuable, usable open space for the community. There is no change to its current designation. The community will have access to the field, much as it does now.

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www.ci.seattle.wa.us/parks/proparks/projects/loyalheightsplayfield.htm



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